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**The Challenges of Promoting Reading Culture in Nigerian Children through Story
Hour, Book Talks and Exhibition: A Case Study of selected Secondary Schools in
Owerri, Imo State, Nigeria.**

by

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Abstract

It has been observed that reading culture among Nigerian children is tragically deficient when compared to the Western world. In this era of high level technological development, it is disheartening to note that reading culture is missing as the younger ones are now embracing watching of home video and accessing the Internet. The paper focused on the challenges of promoting reading culture in Nigerian children through study hour, book talks and exhibition. The study was carried out in some secondary schools in Owerri, Imo State, Nigeria. Ten (10) secondary schools were used and the findings reveals the challenges militating against effective promotion of reading culture in the Nigerian child to include the followings: The Internet trend, lack of academic competitions and schools, non-integration of story-telling in school curriculum, high costs of children's literature among others. Based on the foregoing, adequate recommendations that would promote reading culture in the Nigerian were made. The outcome of the study revealed that promoting reading culture in contemporary Nigerian society with respect to children using book talks, story hour and exhibition has a lot of challenges. The stand point of the paper is that effort should be made by librarians to bring back the reading culture as this will help to develop our nation Nigeria.

Introduction

Reading is a worldwide phenomenon that has the capacity to promote development as well as instill discipline on the individual. For one to play a significant role in contemporary society, the ability to read and write must be there. The survival of any society therefore is a function of the extent to which that society is involved in reading.

Reading according to Yilben and Kitgkka (2008) is a basic life skill as well as the corner stone of child's success in school and throughout life. Reading therefore is an aspect of learning and as such should not be overlooked. Reading as an act plays an important role in creating independent learners. Reading is thus indispensable in sustaining the development of any society.

One of the major avenues for acquiring information is reading and reading is the foundation upon which other academic skills are built (Oyeronke, 2009). However, becoming a skilled and adaptable reader according to Igwe (2011) enhances the chances of success at school and beyond. He views reading as not just for school but for life. He further buttressed reading in all its entirety and variety is vital to being better informed, having a better understanding of us as well as others.

The importance of reading in a nation's development as pointed out by Mefor (2010) cannot be overlooked. Reading is an essential tool for lifelong learning and is important for everyone to develop the rudiments of reading and the culture of reading always so as to survive in life (Igbokwe, Obidike & Ezeji, 2012).

In spite of the importance of reading as a culture, it has become obvious that Nigerian children no longer read. They only read when they have examination to write, outside that,

reading has no meaning to them. Nigerian students hardly make use of the school libraries, in most cases, excuses are that our libraries are not stocked with relevant information sources but the fact remains that the reading culture created early in the twentieth century during the colonial era has been on the decline towards the end of the century (Yilben and Kitgkka, 2008).

The school libraries are expected to help in promoting reading culture among Nigerian children. The School library and school administrators can use various strategies to promote reading culture. As pointed out by Gbadamosi (2007), reading requires books, it goes to mean that good reading habit promotes effective use of library book resources and effective use of library book resources has the inherent/advantage of promoting good reading habit. Since Nigeria according to Aina, Ogungbeni, Adigun, Akesode and Ogundipe (2011) cannot be regarded as a reading nation because the younger generation of Nigerians does not consider reading a leisure activity; it becomes imperative for libraries to explore book talks, story hours and exhibition as a means of promoting reading culture.

There is need for libraries/school libraries to devise an effective means of promoting reading culture since school library are custodian of school information resources. In which case, librarians must make effort to take the book back to the people through book talks, story hours and exhibition.

Book talks (reading) are organized so that children can talk about the interesting books they have read by describing characters and drawing similarities. Story telling on the other hand is not new to Nigerian children and school libraries can explore this avenue to stimulate reading among the Nigerian child. Book talks, story hours and exhibition can be used to

inspire independent reading among students. Exhibition as well can be a powerful means of advertising the books available in school libraries. Exhibition helps to show case books available in school libraries.

The issue at stake is that libraries are faced with challenges since the trend of seeing reading as noble act is non-existing in our contemporary society, with the advent of information technology, where students are always online either to chat, watch film, reading is no longer seen as part of our culture. No wonder, Gbadamosi (2007) sharply pointed out that the culture of reading and reading habit formation has been bedeviled by the complex interwoven effects of human altitude, electronic media and telecommunication development.

Objectives of the Study

The study is set out to achieve the following objectives:

- i. To determine if schools / school libraries in Imo State are involved in programmes that promotes reading culture.
- ii. To establish if story hour, book talks and exhibition are used as strategy for promoting reading culture.
- iii. To determine the extent that story hour, book talks and exhibition are used.
- iv. To ascertain the challenges of promoting reading culture through story hour, book talks and exhibition.
- v. To proffer solutions to the identified problems.

Research Questions

The study was guided by the following research questions:

- i. Is school library involved in programmes that promote reading culture?
- ii. Is story hour, book talks and exhibition used as strategy for promoting reading culture?
- iii. To what extent does school library carry out book talks, story hours and exhibition?
- iv. What are the challenges of promoting reading culture through story hour, book talks and exhibitions in school library?
- v. What are the solutions to the identified problems?

Literature Review

Reading as noted by Anyaemene and Adebola (2011) is a crucial learning activity. Reading to them boosts academic achievement, facilitate knowledge for self-reliance, equip individuals to function meaningfully and effectively in the scheme of things concerning nation building. This implies that the extent to which a nation develops is a function of the reading culture of the citizens of such nation. It goes to mean that reading is a determining factor for national development.

A reading culture as rightly pointed out by Anyansina (2011) is imperative in this age for children who are the future leaders of the nation. He contends that only extensive reading can make acquisition of knowledge possible because it is through reading that children broaden their understanding of life.

Reading culture according to Gbadamosi (2007) is the process of building up positive reading attitude among children and students over a period of time. In other words, reading

culture is an attitude that is developed over a period of time. Reading culture therefore is not hereditary; hence it does not run through the gene from parents to children. Reading culture as observed by Yilben and Kitgkka (2008) citing Taiwo (2006) no longer exist in Nigeria. They asserts that the Nigerian child prefer renting films to buying books and when they are tired of watching, they go to cyber cafes to browse the internet. Reading culture in Nigeria therefore is very low compare to developed countries.

Uwa (2007) x-raying the reading habits of tertiary institution students in Imo state reveals that reading to pass examination, tests, and continuous assessment are the students topmost reading objectives and purposes in libraries. This revelation also confirms the fact that reading culture does not exist in Nigeria.

However, many reasons according to Anyansina (2011) has been advanced by analyst for the poor reading culture among Nigerian children, the harsh economic environment is a major constraint militating against reading culture. Similarly, Igwe (2011) citing Gbadamosi (2007) attributed the low level of reading habits and by multi-varied factors and these factors include: change in Nigerian value system, economic hardship that is prevalent in many homes, astronomical prices of books and other information materials as well as cost of publishing books which is very high.

In view of the situation relating to reading culture in Nigeria, it is clear that there is need for libraries/school librarians to devise an effective means of promoting reading culture since school library are custodian of school information resources. As rightly captures by Kumar, Ansari and Shukla, (2010), one of the major goals of the school library is to inspire a love for reading in order to promote a reading culture among users. In view of this,

libraries/school librarians must make effort to take the book back to the Nigerian child and this can only be achieved if appropriate strategies are devised and applied.

Igwe (2011) articulated the following as strategies for improving reading culture.

- ❖ Giving education priority attention in National human capital development.
- ❖ Establishment of National Commission for Libraries (NCL)
- ❖ Creating of library period in school time table
- ❖ Establishment of family libraries.
- ❖ Formulation and implementation of a viable National Information Policy (NIP).

However, Anyachebehi, Anyaeme and Adebola (2011) in their study revealed that the number of strategies use by teachers in Anambra state to teach reading skills is not encouraging and the implication being that learners are not aware of the skills to apply while reading. These apparently has been a problem.

Improving reading culture in children as noted by Ogbonna and Obiozor (2009) is not without constraints. Some of this impediment according to Boye (1993) as cited in Bello (2006) are:

- ❖ Inadequate attention to the requirement of the potential readership which suggest a need for picture story books and books in local language
- ❖ Disregard for the important role of the illustration and designer in the production of book for children.
- ❖ The high cost of printing inputs and the desire to keep prices down resulting in unattractive, poor quality children books and
- ❖ Inadequate patronage by libraries due to inadequate library resources.

Igwe (2011) attribute part of the constraint to the development of reading culture to literacy apartheid and slavery or literary neo-imperialism, a situation where most of the bookshops in the country prefer shelving foreign authors against indigenous publications.

Ogbonna and Obiozor (2004) citing Agbodike (2007) identifies unavailability of school libraries and more importantly, lack of funding, for where it exists it all. Similarly, the state of facilities such as libraries, books, journals and furniture that are helpful for developing a good reading skill and culture are grossly inadequate (Kolawole, 2009). Again, Igwe (2011) pointed out that there is no clear cut policy on funding school libraries and so these libraries are generally ill-equipped lacking proper organization, qualified staff, relevant information resources such as books, and other educational materials.

In view of all the identified problems, it is imperative that secondary school teachers and teacher librarians should devise means of promoting reading culture among students which may include story hour, books talks and exhibitions. Children and students in schools where there are no libraries as argued by Ania, Ogungbeni, Adigun, Akesode and Ogundipe (2011) can be taken on excursions to libraries in other schools or in their locality, they can also be taken to book exhibitions or fairs as such visit can be used to introduce the children to the library.

Conclusively, school libraries are hoped to encourage children in the use of books and to develop a reading culture according to Ogbonna and Obiozor (2009) improves the academic performance of children and also help them to develop knowledge outside the classroom environment.

Methodology

The population of this survey research includes teacher librarians/library assistants in charge of school libraries in the schools purposively selected from secondary schools in Owerri municipal. Five private owned and five governments owned schools were selected and each has one staff in charge of the library except Federal Government Girls College, Owerri that has 2 staff thereby making the population size Eleven (11).

The questionnaire was the major instrument used for data collection, the data was personally administered to the participants hence the 100 percent (%) return rate of the questionnaires. The frequency counts and percentages was used to analyzed the data generated from the questionnaire and was presented in tables for clarity and easy comprehension.

Results of Findings:

Table 1: *Promotion of reading culture*

	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	10	90.9
No	1	9.1
Total	11	100

From table 1, 10(90.9%) of the participants indicates that their library are involved in programmes that promote reading culture, while 1(9.1%) stated otherwise.

Table 2: Use of story hour, book talks and exhibition as strategy for promoting

Option	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	10	90.9
No	1	9.1
Total	11	100

From table 2, 10 (90.9%) of the participants confirmed that story hour, book talks and exhibition is used as strategy for promotion of reading culture.

Table 3: Extent of application of story hour, book talk and exhibitions

	Frequency	Percentage
Often	3	23.3
Not very often	6	54.5
Undecided	1	9.1
Very often	1	9.1
Total	11	100

From table 3, 3(27.3%) of the participants indicates that story hour, book talks and exhibition are carried out often, 1(9.1%) indicates very often, also 6(54.5%) indicates not very often while 1(9.1%) remains undecided.

Findings from the above table shows that school libraries carry out the programme not very often which implies once in a while or when it is convenient for them.

Table 4: *Impact of story hour, book talks and exhibition*

Option	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	8	72.7
No	3	27.3
Total	11	100

From table 4, 8(72.7%) of the participants indicates that using book talks, story hour and exhibition has helped in promoting reading culture while 3(27.3%) stated otherwise.

Findings therefore reveal that the use of book talks, story hours and exhibition has had some positive impact on the level of reading among Nigerian child.

Table 5: *Challenges of promoting reading culture*

Challenges	Freq.	%
The Internet trend	9	81.8
Corruption among school teacher	-	-
Lack of academic competitions	4	36.4
High costs of children's literature	6	54.5
Non-integration of storytelling in school curriculum	7	63.6
Lack of materials with Nigerian background	5	45.5
Lack of understanding of libraries	-	-
Absence of school libraries	4	36.4
Home video syndrome	7	63.6
Phone addiction	7	63.6

From table 5, 9(81.8%) of the participants indicates the internet trend as a challenges, 4(36.4%) lack of academic competition, 6(54.5%) indicate high costs of children's, literature, 7(63.6%) agreed on non-integration of storytelling in school curriculum, 5(45.5%) views lack of materials with Nigerian background as challenge, 4(36.4%) considered absence of school libraries as challenges with 7(63.6%) indicating home video syndrome and phone addiction as challenges.

Therefore, the major challenges includes, the internet syndrome, home video syndrome, phone addition, non-integration of storytelling into the school curriculum as well as high costs of children's literature.

Table 6: *Suggestions on how to use story hour, books talks and exhibition to improve reading culture.*

	Frequency	Percentage
Creation of library periods in time table	8	72.7
Provision and access to books	7	63.6
Excursions to libraries	7	63.6
Intensified media campaign	5	45.5
Organizing reading competition	9	81.8

From table 6 above, 8(72.7%) of the participants indicates creation of library periods in time table, 7(63.6%) as in support of provision and access to books, similarly 7(63.6%) agreed on excursions to libraries, 5(45.5%) indicates intensified media campaigned while 9(81.8) agreed on organizing reading competition.

The analysis therefore reveals that organizing reading competitions among students, creation of library periods in time table, provision of access to books and excursions to libraries are all strategies that can facilitate the use of book talks and exhibition to improve reading culture.

Discussion of findings

Although the analysis shows that majority of the secondary schools studies carry out programmes that promote reading culture, many of them do it very often and by implication not regularly that can inculcate reading culture into the students. Though, they admit using story hour, book talks and exhibitions as strategy for promoting reading culture, there is dearth of qualified teacher librarians to successfully implement such programmes. Among the ten schools studied, only one which happens to be a government owned school have a teacher librarian with National Diploma (ND) in librarianship. Results of the findings also revealed that book talks, story hour and exhibition has helped in promoting reading culture among the Nigerian child.

Challenges of promoting reading culture through story hour, book talks and exhibition as revealed in the study includes Internet trend, non-integration of storytelling in school curriculum, home video, phone addition as well as high costs of children's literature. This clearly points to the fact that children who are the future leaders of tomorrow has already shift attention from the library as repository of knowledge and are swimming along side with the wave of technological innovations.

Organizing reading competition, creation of library periods in time-table, provision and access to books and excursions to libraries was shown in the study as the possible ways story hour, book talks and exhibitions can be used as strategy to promote reading culture.

Conclusion

It can be concluded from the analysis that story hour, book talks and exhibition are not significantly used as strategies because the teacher librarians lack professional experience and trainings. There is an urgent need to bring the book back to the people and it will take only those with the book to bring it back to the people and librarians are custodians of the book irrespective of the form and as such are in better position to ensure that the Nigerian child imbibe the reading culture.

Recommendations

In view of the identified challenges, the following recommendations are hereby put forward:

1. Integration of story hour, book talks and exhibition into the school curriculum:

Efforts should be made to ensure that story hour, book talks and exhibition are integrated into the school curriculum as this will help to instill reading culture into the Nigerian child.

2. Provision of relevant and current books: you can't just tell somebody to read when there is nothing to read. A survey of our school libraries reveals that they are stocked with outdated and irrelevant materials. How do you expect the secondary school student to read outdated books when they can access relevant books on the Internet. This apparently stressed the need for provision of relevant information materials in school libraries, more especially ICT oriented library services.

3. Recruitment of qualified teacher librarians: It is a common adage that you cannot give what you don't have, therefore school proprietors/heads should ensure that priority is given to employing of qualified teacher librarians. If the library is seen as an integral component of the educational system then the teacher librarian should as well be recognized. A biology teacher

no matter the level of intelligence cannot do the job of a medical doctor, therefore let us not allow those running the school system bastardized our profession.

4. Re-orientation for the parents: The parents of the children in our contemporary society should be given proper orientation on the importance of reading in the life of their children. The application of technology to our educational system should not in any way over-ride the place of reading culture. In which case the Internet trend, home video syndrome and phone addiction cannot be effectively addressed without the co-operation of the parents of the school children.

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